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The Minnesota Studies in International Development Program at the University of Minnesota

THOMAS O'TOOLE*

ABSTRACT — The Minnesota Studies in International Development Program is a new program to engage University of Minnesota students and faculty in systematic, long term cooperative research with community outreach to individuals in Third World countries who are involved in development work. The program: 1) involves Americans and people in Third World countries directly in a common task so that they may learn from one another, 2) brings the tools of science (both Western and non-Western) to bear on the development of less developed nations, 3) helps internationalize the curriculum of the University, and 4) helps replenish the dwindling stock of professionally trained international development specialists in the United States and in several Third World countries.

Internship agreements for students have been signed with ENDA-Dakar and are underway with Grupo Social in Colombia, various agencies in Jamaica, and the Mazingira Institute and other agencies in Kenya. A language, cross-cultural and skills package created specifically for this program is also being developed. Community outreach programs have been initiated.

Background

Hubert H. Humphrey introduced legislation in the U.S. Senate in 1961 to establish the United States Peace Corps. The proposal, directed at the developing countries now known as the South, followed similar programs elsewhere (e.g., the British Voluntary Service Overseas, which began in 1958), and helped to stimulate a subsequent dramatic increase in the number of such organizations around the world. The focus of United States international assistance also shifted at about this same time from Europe to the emerging Third World nations. Yet the academic community, whether in the "developed" or "developing" world, has never fully responded to the growing interdisciplinary and cross-cultural focus of international development. Post-secondary education, a rare privilege for most of the world's population, has not met the need for applied interdisciplinary study of the social and economic development problems of the world today.

Universities in developed and underdeveloped countries have failed to address the concrete problems of social and economic development for a number of reasons. First, they seldom provide students with an adequate balance of those skills — technical, problem-solving, and managerial — which development work requires. The gap between real world needs and available service workers continues to widen.

Secondly, the dominance of cognitive instruction at the university level does not necessarily foster the personal growth, empathy and practical life experience which development practitioners need. The gap between theory and practice is not diminished.

Finally, most universities are formally linked neither to the social and economic needs of local communities and institutions in developed or developing countries nor to global development concerns in general. They are therefore not required to respond directly to social and economic problems.

Thus, the gap is growing between university educated people in developed and underdeveloped countries and the great majority of people in the world.

Fortunately, the academic community has always had a few

people who see the value of combining work-learning with classroom education. The Cooperative Education Program, internships in social work and a few other examples at the University of Minnesota testify to this. Linking interdisciplinary academic learning with work experience in intercultural and international education. Minnesota Studies in International Development (MSID) is one example of current innovative efforts to link interdisciplinary academic learning with work experience in intercultural and international education.

The Minnesota Studies in International Development Program

Now in its beginning stages, MSID is attempting to develop: 1) a Peace Corps-like experience where vocational education, research, applied science, and consciousness-raising are combined in learning experiences designed in conjunction with development agencies in a number of Third World countries; 2) multidisciplinary courses and training programs which will assist both American and Third World students, faculty and practitioners to develop cooperative, goal-specific approaches to solving social and economic development problems; and 3) community outreach mechanisms which will allow students, faculty and community members both in the United States and in Third World countries to learn about and from one another.

The ideas for the project originated in the summer of 1981 with a group of faculty, staff and students at the University of Minnesota. The principal people involved were: Sally Flax, Associate Administrator, Office of International Programs; Gail Hughes, Graduate Student and Representative, College of Education; Barbara Knudson, Professor, Quigley Center; Josef Mestenhauser, Professor and Director, International Student Adviser's Office; Frank Miller, Professor, Department of Anthropology; Chip Peterson, Coordinator of Foreign Studies; Philip W. Porter, Director, Office of International Programs; and Miriam Seltzer, Assistant Professor and Coordinator, Center for Youth Development and Research. These individuals felt that the decline in the number of development practitioners and scholars

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with field experience that the University was generating was detrimental to both American understanding of Third World development and the development needs of those countries. Furthermore, they recognized the need to enhance interdisciplinary and field-based learning, faculty research and community understanding of development issues.

For the University, the project serves a number of purposes. It broadens American students' education and assists in internationalizing the University. Ideally, it also should help students from Third World countries become more aware of the grassroots needs in their own nations and to begin evolving better means for answering these needs.

The project was funded in 1982 by a grant from the General Service Foundation to Philip W. Porter, Director of the Office of International Program and Professor of Geography. It was formally initiated in March, 1982, when Thomas O'Toole, an Africanist on leave from Western Carolina University, became Program Director. Paulette Elster, an anthropologist with health care training, and other staff from the Office of International Programs and other departments comprise the rest of the project's work force. Dr. Porter has continued to devote approximately twenty percent of his time to the program.

The diverse groups involved in MSID share some basic ideas about social and economic development and development education. They see the field of social and economic development as a global concern, important to the people of Minnesota as well as to the people of developing countries. In addition to their willingness to accept the principle and reality of international interdependence, the groups also understand the need for a broad multidisciplinary approach to development issues. They realize that no one discipline has all the answers to the complex issues involved in the economic and social development of widely divergent countries and ecosystems. Key members of the group also agree that self-mobilization by the rural poor ought to be the major focus of development programs.

MSID has made considerable progress in developing core courses, internships, collaterals, certificate programs, minors, community outreach links and University recognition during its first year in existence. To date, nine students have been overseas participants. By the end of 1984, nearly forty more students will have had this experience. Ultimately, it is hoped, MSID will link the University and national and international development agencies and institutions involved in this process, and will serve as a model of cooperative work and research exchange which will be more widely adopted.

Courses

Three courses have been created for the program so far: Perspectives on International Development; International Development Seminar: Agriculture, Home Economics, Women and Youth; and Topics in International Policy Analysis.

When Perspectives on International Development was first offered in the fall of 1983, it attracted 42 students from nursing, vocational education and animal husbandry as well as a large number of International Relations majors with specific development focus. Topics covered included approaches to development in mainstream development economics; theories of dependency and underdevelopment as originally proposed by various African and Latin American scholars; and development ethics à la Denis Goulet and Ivan Illich.

The International Development Seminar, taught during winter quarter 1983, sought to establish a working concept of rural economic development in the context of women and children. It drew on departments in the College of Agriculture, Home

Economics, the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, and the Department of Anthropology.

The third course, Topics in International Policy Analysis, is taught with the help of international students from Third World nations whose own unique perceptions of development are analyzed and criticized by both faculty and student seminar participants.

All three courses are open to eligible upper level undergraduates and graduate students with no prerequisites and draw on a wide range of students besides those involved in the MSID program.

Internships

The MSID program has established a relationship with development institutes in the Caribbean, Colombia and Kenya. It has already made internship agreements with ENDA-TM (Environnement et Développement du Tiers Monde) in Dakar, Senegal. This international nongovernmental organization operates within a movement which is bringing together a growing number of organizations and individuals promoting development technologies which benefit the less-favored nations and communities. It is also concerned with bringing technology to rural populations, publishing material relative to that aim, and participating in the debate about Third World development.

At ENDA-TM, MSID student interns join staff of ongoing research projects in Senegal and are accountable to the local director. Projects include village participatory planning in the Casamance region, women's handicraft production in Dakar's shantytowns, the agricultural export sector of the Senegalese economy, a survey analysis of the Dakar real-estate market and nonformal education systems in rural areas of Senegal.

Interns accepted by ENDA are expected to write clearly and succinctly, have a functional knowledge of French, and exhibit adequate cross-cultural sensitivity to work as part of multicultural teams. ENDA provides work and site orientation, cross-cultural training sessions, research materials, staff support, and work-related transportation. ENDA also takes care of all work permit and visa formalities with the government of Senegal.

In Colombia, MSID is developing a working relationship with a social and economic development conglomerate called Grupo Social. This organization blends the social commitment flowing out of Vatican II and a strong emphasis on the social sciences. Its ultimate goal is to use its increasing leverage and the expanded political consciousness of the poor with whom it works to bring about structural changes toward a more just distribution of wealth and political power.

With Grupo Social, students also are involved as research and project assistants. Projects include work in nonformal education centers and community based low-income self-help housing projects, microbusiness programs in the "informal sector," and the establishment of major recreation facilities in poor barrios. A major benefit associated with the Grupo Social program is that students have access to the organization's reflective seminars, designed to promote continuous critical analysis of the Grupo and its projects.

In Kenya, MSID works with the Mazingira Institute and some other nonprofit agencies. The Kenya-based Mazingira Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization doing research and practical projects dealing with low-income groups. The Institute has completed a report on Matatu Transportation in Nairobi (informal public taxis), established Agroforestry Pilot Demonstration plots in rural areas of Kenya, and continues a program of environmental information with rural children in Kenya using comic strips.

Mazingira Institute has agreed to accept five graduate students

in a peer-paired study of women's economic potential in a poor urban settlement. This study, like all of the Institute projects, is aimed at developing programs to address problems uncovered by the studies. In this and other projects our students have the benefit of working cooperatively with young, dedicated Kenyans in a dynamic and growing organization.

In Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean, internships are established through the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and selected private voluntary organizations. The Minnesota Placement Board, a group of five people in Jamaica, has volunteered to help match students with agencies and institutions. These five key persons include three well established women who have access to major sites for relevant and productive student work in Jamaica. One of the three, Novlett Jones, Chief Home Economics, Ministry of Agriculture, serves as MSID's chief contact person in Jamaica. She will be informed of all contacts desired and/or made for persons from Minnesota interested in internships, and any other business or details necessary to conduct an ongoing system for student placement, agency feedback, and (within two years) evaluation of the program.

Collaterals and Minors

The Center for Youth Development and Research at the University of Minnesota has created an International Development Collateral which attempts to integrate aspects of agriculture and home economics for more effective work and research in rural economic and social development. This collateral requires or recommends the courses developed by MSID.

Students in the College of Agriculture can also use the three core MSID courses and the internships to earn a minor in International Agriculture. This opportunity allows College of Agriculture students to broaden the scope of their basic education and is in addition to their major and all-college requirements.

An interdisciplinary minor in Development Studies is possible in the College of Liberal Arts through the Institute of International Studies. A major in International Relations with an International Development track is also available.

The Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs will allow Master of Arts and Master of Planning students as well as doctoral candidates from other departments to use the MSID core courses and internships as part of their International Development and Foreign Affairs area. The College of Education has also begun serious study of the possibility of incorporating the MSID core courses and internship into a development education focus.

Remaining Tasks

The most innovative aspect of the original MSID program, a reciprocal internship at the University of Minnesota for members of overseas organizations and integrated cooperative research programs, is only in the embryonic stage. Here again, the needs of agencies in the Third World which will take our interns and the match between overseas research needs and the University of Minnesota faculty's interests can only be assessed once the field placements are operational.

MSID is becoming established as an ongoing University of Minnesota program on a number of fronts. Funding is being sought through regular reallocation channels in the University and from federal and private agencies. A network of University and community people interested in international development is gradually being expanded. The pre- and post-departure orientation courses for students and faculty need considerable further development.

The Future of MSID

It is far too early to predict the outcome of any of the project's plans and goals. Considerable support for the field based component of the proposal has come from African and Latin American respondents to internship requests. The ENDA contract appears quite promising. In this first experimental year MSID was able to place two students from the Third World (Cameroon and Haiti) and five women from the United States as interns with ENDA in Senegal. Personal and working relationships with members of the ENDA staff have grown and one key ENDA staff person has visited the University of Minnesota. As one MSID student put it, "This (the internship) is one of the most amazing educational and *life* experiences I've ever had." All of the members of the first group were similarly impressed and agreed that a field-based internship is a key to real understanding in development studies. A number of these interns have expressed a desire to continue careers in international development.

Faculty support and interest in the project has also been growing at a steady pace. The University of Minnesota administration's support, especially that of President C. Peter Magrath, seems to be quite strong. As the Wolof proverb says, "Slowly, slowly the monkey catches his food in the bush."